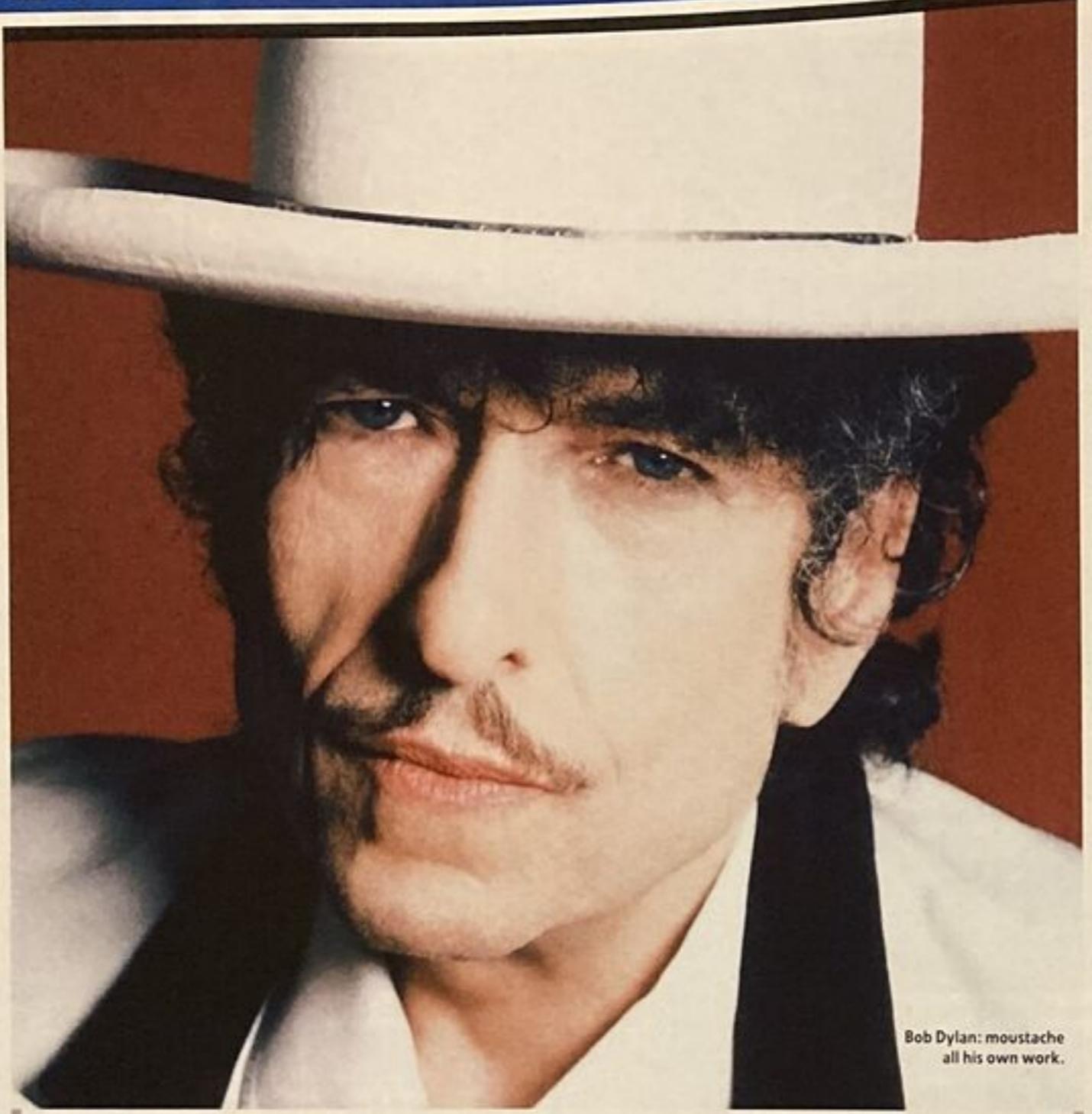


new albums



Bob Dylan: moustache
all his own work.

Joker Man

Facing old age with a smile.

Bob Dylan

Love And Theft

COLUMBIA 504164-2

AT THE TURN of the 1980s, his most accident-prone decade by furlongs, Bob Dylan released *Oh Mercy*. His fans rejoiced, the world spun off its axis, and then he brought out the pretty threadbare *Under The Red Sky*. For some, the disappointment positively ached. That turn of events is bound to inform expectations vis-à-vis his 30th studio album: given that 1997's *Time Out Of Mind* was so good, pessimists may be bracing themselves for anticlimax. Thankfully, this is little short of a treat: a rambunctious dance through the more sepia-tinted corners of US musical history, split – broadly speaking – between 12-bar R&B and (no, really) swing ballads. On both counts, its author does rather well.

If *Time Out Of Mind* tended to find Dylan staring into the abyss, here he seems to have concluded that, when faced with the travails of late middle age, humour is the better option. "Everybody get ready to lift up your glasses and say/I'm a-standing on the table, proposin' a toast to decay," goes the rockabilly-esque *Summer Days*. One verse later comes this: "She said, Ya can't repeat the past/I said, Ya

can't? Whaddya mean ya can't – of course ya can!" The lines, Dylanologists may be intrigued to know, are from *The Great Gatsby*. On the swing numbers, things get funnier. It's only Dylan's lived-in voice and sheer presence that lets him get away with some of the lines here. Take *Poor Boy*: "Man came to the door/I said, For whom are you lookin'/? Said, Your wife/I said, she's busy in the kitchen, cookin'". Really, who needs scansion?

Such tomfoolery apart, there are two strait-laced songs that instantly join the roll-call of Dylan classics. *Mississippi* could sit comfortably on 1989's esteemed *Oh Mercy*. The stunning *Sugar Baby*, meanwhile, is a message to an estranged lover, somewhere between a tired final goodbye and a sardonic put-down – in that sense, it's not entirely misplaced to think of it in the same terms as *Idiot Wind* from *Blood On The Tracks*. Consider *Love And Theft* in the context of its predecessor, and you come to a welcome conclusion. Bob Dylan has followed an excellent album with a very good one. And that hasn't happened since 1976. ★★★★
John Harris

Like this? Try these... The Mills Brothers *The Very Best Of The Mills Brothers* (various) | Pee Wee Crayton *Blues Guitar Magic* (various) | Various *Red Hot! The Very Best Of Sun Rockabilly* (various)

Joe Henry

Scar

MAMMOTH/EDEL 0117572MAM
Roving US songwriter still roving. This time with Ornette Coleman along for the ride.

If 1996's exquisite *Trampoline* couldn't elevate Joe Henry's fortunes then nothing can. Still, with this eighth album, Madonna's sister's husband shows little sign of compromise. Further away than ever from the Jayhawks-assisted organic rock for which he acquired a cult following, *Scar* ropes in trumpeter/saxophonist Ornette Coleman and enfant terrible jazz pianist Brad Mehldau to mess up the thoughtfully twisted lyrics. The snail's-paced Richard Pryor Addresses A Tearful Nation and strung-out title cut may tax the non-jazz enthusiast but Henry functions perfectly elsewhere. Mean Flower, Stop (written for his sister-in-law) and Edgar Bergen – the latter's orchestral swoops and patterning drums fleshing out his finest vocal yet – delivering perfect snapshots of what Henry does best: boney dry storytelling by a younger, less ruined Tom Waits.

Exceptional. ★★★★

Mark Blake

Like this? Try these...

Bruce Cockburn *Charity Of Night* (various) 1997
Mark Hollis *Mark Hollis* (various) 1991
David Gray *White Ladder* (various) 1999

John Hiatt

The Tiki Bar Is Open

SANCTUARY 540CD 098
That tricky (gulp) 16th album from cult US songmeister perennial.

A pedigree songwriter whose clients have included everybody from Iggy Pop to Conway Twitty, John Hiatt's name means little more now than when he started in the mid-70s. While *The Tiki Bar Is Open* won't change anything, long haul Hiatt-watchers will have no cause for complaint. After last year's drumless *Crossing Muddy Waters*, he's reunited with his old road outfit, The Goners (including ace guitarist Sonny Landreth), to deliver a rollicking bar band set that blends characteristically picaresque rockers with tender ballads before signing-off in fine style with the spacey Farther Stars. Wry, worldly and with a kick like a satanic mule, it's never too late to get acquainted, you know. ★★★★
Peter Kane

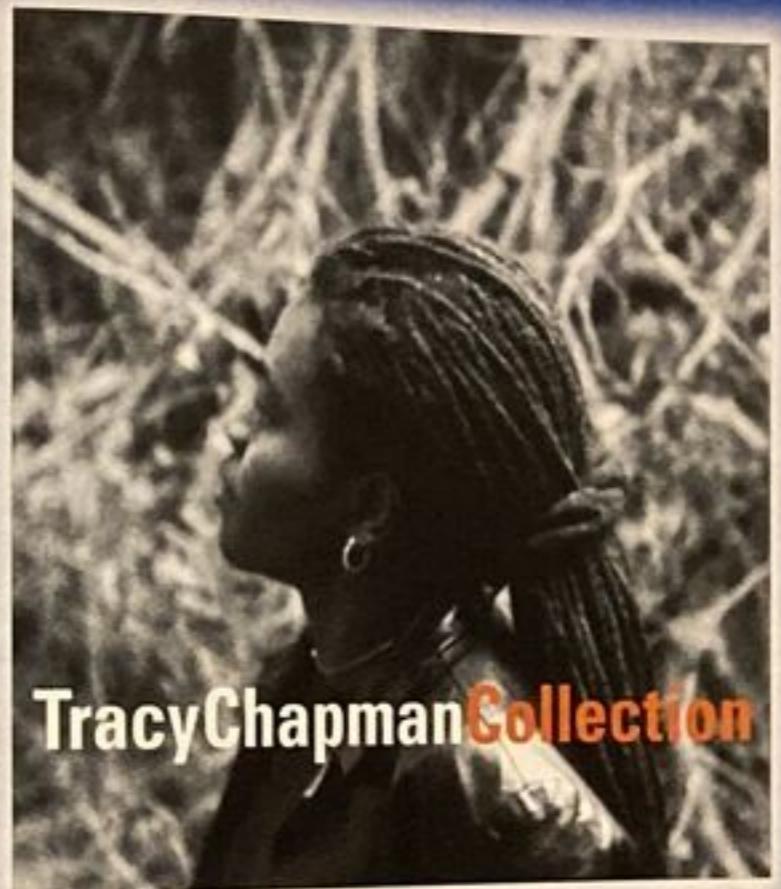
Standout Tracks

Mississippi
Poor Boy
Sugar Baby



Hop on Q4music.com, the only web site that can be arsed to pore over 40 Dylan albums, classifying them "the best", "recommended", "worth investigating", "collector's only" and "Down In The Groove".

classact



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new albums

kd lang

Live By Request

WARNER BROS 9362493082

The country star plays her songs live and, well, by request.

kd lang's first live album also serves as her first greatest hits release, recorded, as it was, for a US TV series which invites fans to send in requests. The resultant 14 tracks include the inevitable Constant Craving, Three Cigarettes and, from last year's excellent Invincible Summer LP, Summer Fling. If the sheer quality of the songs is a given, their recorded performance is a disappointment. The drums are often too loud, odd instruments push themselves to the fore at awkward moments and, perhaps spurred on by the enthusiastic applause, lang veers towards exuberant over-singing. Once or twice, though, as on the tender Trail Of Broken Hearts and the stomping Miss Chatelaine, material and performance get it together just right. ★★★

David Roberts

Bill Laswell

Divine Light

COLUMBIA/LEGACY CDX 502239 9

The avant rocker's remixed, reordered vision of early '70s Carlos Santana.

Bassist/producer Bill Laswell earned his über-muso stripes long ago, but it was his 1998 Miles Davis project, *Panthalassa*, that showed what he could do when invited to remix and reorder historic recordings. Music from Carlos Santana's 1973 *Love Devotion Surrender* project with guitarist John McLaughlin and his 1974 *Illuminations* with Alice Coltrane (John's missus) gets the Laswell treatment this time. All three musicians were devotees of guru Sri Chinmoy, and spiritual themes abound (in a post-John Coltrane Western-harp-Eastern-percussion way). But Laswell's sense of structure is extraordinary, and he adds layers of excitement, and intrigue that not even the musicians involved could have imagined. ★★★★

Linton Chiswick

Love As Laughter

Sea To Shining Sea

SUB POP SP131

Skewed rock classicism from Beck collaborator and pals.

It's cruelly symptomatic of Love As Laughter's position in the US alt-rock firmament that frontman Sam Jayne works as a washer-up in a chi-chi Seattle burrito restaurant favoured by the city's rock glitterati. But while Jayne has spent the last six years up to his elbows in

suds, his band has also been knocking out some invigoratingly amped-up music. Encompassing three decades of scuzz-rock cool, *Sea To Shining Sea* circles biker rock and black-hearted Velvet Underground grooves. Single Temptation Island makes like AC/DC playing tin-foil guitars, while The Square even resurrects raga-rock. Perhaps the time has come to give up the day job. ★★★

Pot Long

Nick Lowe

The Convincer

PROPER PRPCD 012

Basher still telling it like it is, 12th time around.

Nick Lowe has been going forever long enough to make the art of making records seem as natural as drawing breath. Containing 10 originals plus Johnny Rivers' Poor Side Of Town and Arthur Prysock's Only A Fool Breaks His

Own Heart, *The Convincer* slots in smoothly behind 1998's *Dig My Mood*. The settings are understated, the vocals conversational, while the songs, as filtered through the rueful eyes of this fiftysomething Englishman, gaze lovingly back to the glory days of Stax, Brill Building pop and Johnny Cash ruling the country roost. As amiably soured as ever, I'm A Mess, Homewrecker and Lately I've Let Things Slide all hit

that unique Lowe spot. ★★★

Peter Kane

Cheb Mami

Dellali

VIRGIN CDVIR 147

He's Sting's Algerian mate, you know...

Even fervent internationalists might balk at this latest concoction from the self-styled Prince Of Rai. With production duties split

between Nile Rodgers and Nitin Sawhney plus a guest list that includes Sting, Ziggy Marley, Chet Baker, the English Symphony Orchestra and London Community Gospel Choir, Dellali sounds simultaneously like a last, desperate attempt to reach an audience beyond the Parisian suburbs. Let's Edith Piaf, anyone? Thought not. A bit funky here, a touch of gypsy there, it's all so damned breezy and shiny and eager-to-

please. Hardly surprising that the best track, Tzazae, should also be the most traditional. ★★

Peter Kane

Maxwell

Now

COLUMBIA 497454

Third studio album from New York's classic soulster.

If Urban Hang Suite was about the past and Embryia the future, Now is

Maxwell with feet firmly in the present. A much more focussed and funky set than Embryia, it still features mostly slow songs (including Kate Bush's *A Woman's Work*) about the emotions and uncertainties of love, but with a more carnal element and an upbeat party ending. The arrangements too are still snaky, sinewy and delay-laden, weaving in unusual touches, from Memphis-style brass and clarinet to harp and banjo, alongside Maxwell's impassioned vulnerability. The more urgent numbers recall early Prince in their syncopation, rock guitars and suggestive falsetto, while the naggily catchy dance groove of Noone might yet see Maxwell cracking the UK singles charts. ★★★

Jon Cunniff

Macy Gray

The Id

EPIC 504099 2

WHEN THE Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill sold

millions, it was with a sense of inevitability. As a beautiful member of the most popular hip hop act of the mid '90s, Hill was assured success. Not so Macy Gray. An unknown with a voice that suggested she had sucked helium from a party balloon, and an unconventional image infamously mocked by Ali G at the Brits, Gray defied music industry logic to sell seven million copies of her resolutely old-school 1999 debut *On How Life Is*. Unlike Hill, Gray did not object when white audiences bought her album in the kind of numbers currently enjoyed by her everyman namesake David.

For her second album, Macy Gray has called in some big names including producer Rick Rubin, Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante, organist Billy Preston (a veteran of both Beatles and Rolling Stones sessions), nu-soul divas Erykah Badu and Angie Stone, and Wimbledon-born ex-con rapper Slick Rick. The result is an album rich in texture and guaranteed to top shopping lists come Christmas.

As any good shrink will attest, this album's title refers to Freud's theory of the pleasure-seeking subconscious, but Gray's Bridget Jones constituency have nothing to fear. The Id is business as usual. The first single Sweet Baby co-stars Badu and moves as slinkily as Gray's breakthrough hit *I Try*. Likewise, Boo and Harry echo the quietly horny soul of her debut.

It is only when she tries something a little different that Macy comes unstuck. Sexual Revolution, a Prince-inspired disco number, is the least sexy song about sex since WASP's *Animal* (*Fuck Like A Beast*). Worse, Oblivion is a cod-Broadway showpiece that makes Meat Loaf sound understated. On these two tracks Gray is trying too hard, and needlessly so. There is enough subtle invention in the freaky funk of Related To A Psychopath and the gospel/hip hop crossover of Hey Young World II (reminiscent of Jay-Z's *Hard Knock Life*) to keep her music fresh. And there are still just enough seductive songs to give Lauryn Hill a few sleepless nights. ★★★

Paul Elliott

Standout Tracks

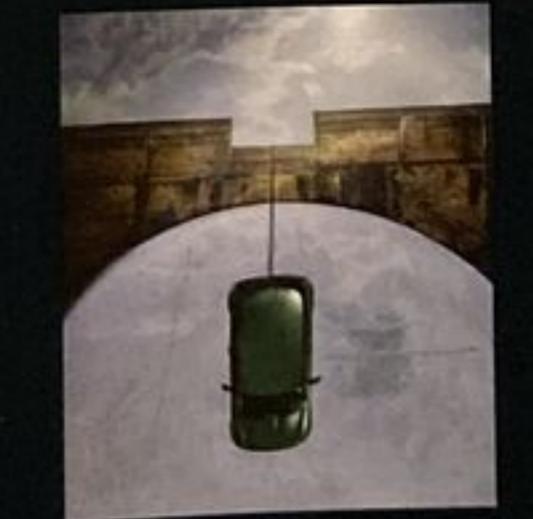
- Sweet Baby
- Related To A Psychopath
- Harry



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Shrink Wrapped

There's always been a Freudian sex-Broadway element to her music.



Spot the sweet comedy music - Macy Gray perhaps - amid the Delirious with Q4music.com's soul buyer's guide. Jones, The Four Tops, Aretha Franklin: the best albums to buy are listed here.

